01006

1963/10/03

171. Telegram From the Central Intelligence Agency Station in Saigon to the Agency[1]

Saigon, October 3, 1963.

1385. 1. On 2 Oct 1963 Lt Col Conein accidentally encountered Maj Gen Tran Van Don at Tan Son Nhut Airport. Don stated he had been attempting to make contact with Conein for some time. Requested that Conein come to Nha Trang on night of 2 Oct for private discussion. Conein was noncommittal in his reply.

2. Col Conein's visiting Nha Trang to talk with Don was approved by Trueheart.

3. Trueheart's guidance to Conein was that he neither to encourage nor discourage any coup thinking or action, to elicit information only and not to commit the USG to any action whatsoever.

4. Conein met with Don in Nha Trang on night of 2 Oct for approximately one hour. No other persons were present during the meeting. Don made the following points:

a. Duong Van Minh desires to see Conein for private conversation.

b. Meeting with Minh will take place 0800 hours 5 Oct at Joint General Staff Headquarters, Saigon.

c. At that hour Conein is to present himself in uniform at Don's office. Cover topic of conversation will be possible relocation of United States Special Forces headquarters. (*Comment:* This is a cover topic

[1] Source: Department of State, Central Files, POL 26 S VIET. Secret; Immediate; Eyes Only. The source text is the copy sent by the CIA to the Department of State exclusive for Rusk, Ball, Harriman, and Hilsman. The telegram was also sent exclusive to the White House for Bundy and to the Assistant Chief of Staff (Intelligence), Department of the Army, exclusive for McNamara, Gilpatric, Taylor, and Krulak. It was received at the Department of State at 2:06 p.m. on October 3 and passed to USUN for Rusk eyes only.

only suggested by Gen Don. CAS Saigon would not undertake discussion such a matter since this would be solely within MACV prerogatives.)

d. Conein will speak to Minh alone.

e. Gen Ton That Dinh has realized he was "played for a fool" during his tenure as Military Governor of Saigon. For this reason "may join our side."

f. Gen Tran Van Kim and Gen Phan Xuan Chieu have been given staff positions under Gen Don on the JGS.

g. The Generals (specific personalities not identified) have requested President Diem to accord them positions of Minister of Defense, Minister of Interior, Minister of Education, Minister of Civic Action, and the Prefector of the Police for Saigon/Cholon. In addition, Generals asked President Diem to appoint a general officer Military Governor Saigon/Cholon to insure defense of area. Generals are convinced Diem has no intention of making these appointments.

5. Conein attempted to elicit additional details from Don who refused all attempts at elicitation with statement "you must talk to Minh." Don did volunteer, however, that Generals "now have a plan." Don was emphatic with respect to this last statement.

6. Don also stated that two days prior to Gen Dinh's first press conference (29 Aug) Vietnamese civilian otherwise unidentified visited Ngo Dinh Nhu, stated that Americans were contacting various Vietnamese in order to encourage a coup. Thereupon Nhu had called in Don and Don was shown list of Americans engaged in such coup plots. Don stated Conein's name was not on this list.

7. Ambassador has approved Conein's contact with Don and Minh on 5 October.